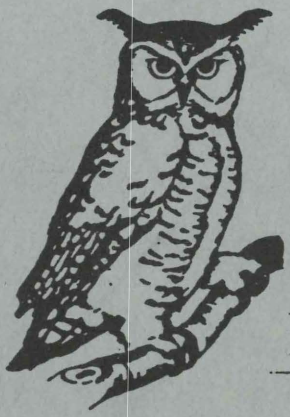
Thames Science Center

NOV. 1968

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
LIBRARY
NEW LONDON, CONN.
NO 1 '68
STACKS

Naturalist notebook,



NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

NOVEMBER 1968 VOLUME III NO. 11

CONTENTS

Front Cover: Saw-Whet Owl
Back Cover: Lantern Hill Family Nature Jaunt

CHILDREN'S SECTION

Nature Calendar 1
Children's Corner 3
Pet Corner 5
Connecticut Creatures 6
Along The Shore 8
Rock Hounds 10

ADULT SECTION

Executive Director's Page 11
Your Own Family Jaunt 13
Field Notes 15

ACTIVITIES FOR NOVEMBER

..... Inside back cover.

Published by the

THAMES SCIENCE CENTER

622 Williams Street
New London, Connecticut 06320

Copyright © 1968

JOHN F. GARDNER--*Executive Director*
ROBERT C. DEWIRE--*Naturalist*
MICHAEL WALKER--*Curator*

The NATURALIST NOTEBOOK is published monthly. Subscription available through membership only.

The Thames Science Center is a nonprofit organization seeking a quality environment through education.

The active support of children and adults in the Science Center, its programs, activities and efforts is earnestly solicited.

– YOUR MEMBERSHIP HELPS SUPPORT AND MAINTAIN –

The Interpretive Museum of 622 Williams Street, New London, Connecticut 06320

The Peace Sanctuary Nature Preserve At 200 River Road, Mystic, Connecticut 06355

NOVEMBER'S NATURE CALENDAR

NOVEMBER is the month of sparrows. These birds which are looked on by the average person as "drab brown birds" actually are very handsome and vary tremendously in color. November is the month when most of them can be found in this area--many of them at your feeders. Here is a list of them and their identifying marks.

SAVANNAH SPARROW--a bird of open fields and marshes with a streaked breast and yellow on the sides of the face.

SLATE-COLORED JUNCO--A gray bird with white stomach, pink bill and white in the tail when it flies.

TREE SPARROW--Has a red cap and clear breast except for a black spot in the center.

FIELD SPARROW--Very small--chickadee size with a bright pink bill.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW--Uncommon; large with a black and white striped crown.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW--Common; large with a black and white striped head and white throat patch--clear breast.

FOX SPARROW--Our largest sparrow; very reddish brown with a heavily streaked breast.

SWAMP SPARROW--A dark sparrow of wet areas; a dark striped crown and an orange patch on each wing.

SONG SPARROW--A brown bird with a streaked breast--the streaks coming together to form a dot in the center of the breast.

Watch for these sparrows in your travels and at your feeders and see if you can identify them.

November's Nature Calendar

November is the month of waterfowl and the first snow.

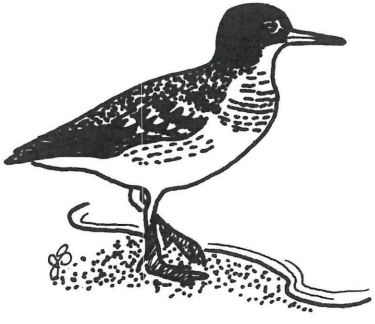
November 2... Berries of dogwood, black alder and holly disappear as birds turn to them for food.

November 4... Full moon called the Beaver moon.

November 6... Ducks and geese migrating in large numbers have to beware of hunters.

November 9... The day is only 10 hours and 1 minute long and growing shorter.

November 11... Short-eared Owls may be seen flying over expanses of marshland searching for food.



November 13... All trees are bare but for the golden blossom of the witch hazel.

November 14... Golden-eye ducks arrive for the winter along our coast.

November 17... Purple Sandpipers--hardy shore-birds that stay on rocks along the coast--arrive for the winter.

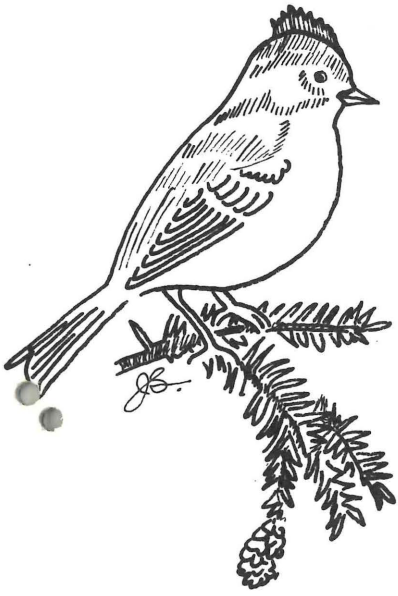
November 19... Feeding stations are filled with birds--and unfortunately--squirrels.

November 23... Evening grosbeaks, hopefully, arrive at feeders in the area.

November 26... The large fox sparrows arrive at feeders for the winter.

November 28... Thanksgiving Day--Turkeys Beware!

November 30... Watch for the large snowy owl on beaches and open field areas--or on TV antennas or the roof of your house.



THE CHILDREN'S CORNER

by TRUDY GARDNER

THE RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET

On these cold November days if we look out our windows, we'll see a great deal of activity at our bird feeding stations.

These winter birds are very valuable to us as they help to rid us of the eggs of harmful insects and the seeds of weeds. We have feeding stations for our winter birds because it helps them when their food supply gets scarce. It also helps us to better know some of these friends, by letting us get a close look at them.

At the Peace Sanctuary we have a winter visitor called the ruby-crowned kinglet. It is smaller than the slate-colored junco and much smaller than the sparrow. In fact, the kinglet is the smallest bird we have except for the hummingbird who visits us only in the summer.

Why are these birds called kinglets? Maybe it is because of the ruby-colored crown on its head, but this can be seen only when the bird is excited or mad. Here is another possible answer.

There is a legend that long ago the birds were all having a meeting. They were trying to decide who should be king. They said that whoever could fly the highest would win the title. The strongest of our birds would fly the highest. They all flew up and the eagle was the bird who seemed to be the highest in the sky. All of a sudden he noticed that he had a passenger stealing a ride on his back. This passenger was the little kinglet who flew off the eagle's back and went still higher to be the winner. When they all flew down to earth again, they named this little bird "kinglet". "King" because he had flown the highest of all, and "let" because he was so small.

The kinglet has a squeaky little sound that he sings to himself as he looks for insects. The food for this bird is much scarcer than the seeds most of our winter songbirds eat, so we don't have as many kinglets wintering with us as we do seed-eaters like juncos.

I hope that you can get to see at least one of these little birds while they are here this winter. Perhaps you'll be lucky enough to have one visit your feeder area.

PET CORNER

by DAVE RICHARDS

SALAMANDERS

Now that autumn is here, many animals will soon be preparing for their winter hibernation. This month we will discuss such an animal of the amphibian class--the salamander.

Salamanders look very much like tadpoles soon after they are hatched. As they mature, they grow long tails and legs. Their gills are lost and replaced by lungs, very much like their relative, the frog. Salamanders live on land, but cannot stand dryness. They must live in swampy or moist areas to protect their skins. As there are no salt water amphibians, you would find salamanders near fresh water ponds and lakes.

The salamanders eat earthworms and insects. They lay their eggs in water, sometimes as many as 80 at one time. The eggs hatch in two or three weeks, as a larva. They later develop into the tadpole stage mentioned before.

During the cold winter months, the salamanders find it necessary to hibernate to protect themselves. If you find a salamander during the next few weeks and take it home for the winter, be sure to provide a dark, moist tank with something for it to hide under.

The salamander will probably eat very little if he is hibernating.

CONNECTICUT CREATURES *by MIKE WALKER*

CONNECTICUT'S TWO POISONOUS REPTILES-- MONSTERS OR MARVELS?

The words "Copperhead" and "Rattlesnake" usually strike fear into the hearts of even those sturdy souls who aren't afraid of most snakes, and the reaction of some people at the thought of these poisonous snakes can approach sheer panic. The main reason for this is suggested by a word we have already mentioned--poisonous. Connecticut's two venomous reptiles, the northern copperhead and the timber rattlesnake, do not possess poison as a part of an evil plot against the human race and I hope that a closer discussion of the two animals will at least dispel a few misunderstandings.

The copperhead and the rattlesnake have poison for only one reason--to kill the animals on which they feed. The snakes have two venom glands located toward the back of the upper jaw. The glands are connected by a hollow duct or tube to a pair of large movable teeth towards the front of the mouth. These special teeth are also hollow and very sharp. When the snake bites an animal a dose of poison is pressed out of the venom glands and it travels through the ducts and the fangs and is literally injected into the bitten animals.

Neither a copperhead or a rattlesnake wants to bite you since you are not part of their diet, but of course both will try to in self-defense--if they are stepped on, grabbed, stoned, or otherwise mistreated.

The northern copperhead is the only one of the poisonous duo to reach our immediate area. These are fairly large snakes. Some real giants may grow over four feet in length, but a much more usual size is between 20 and 30 inches. The color pattern is a series of wavy tan crossbands, narrow on top and wider on the sides. The bands are usually tan and the ground color reddish, hence one of the local names for this animal--"red snake". A typical home for the copperhead is a wooded hillside with an abundance of rocky ledges extending back into the earth. There usually must be some water nearby.

Copperheads eat a varied diet. Depending on the season of the year, the snakes may feed on mice, moles, birds, frogs, cicadas and even grasshoppers. The young copperheads I am raising have accepted small frogs.

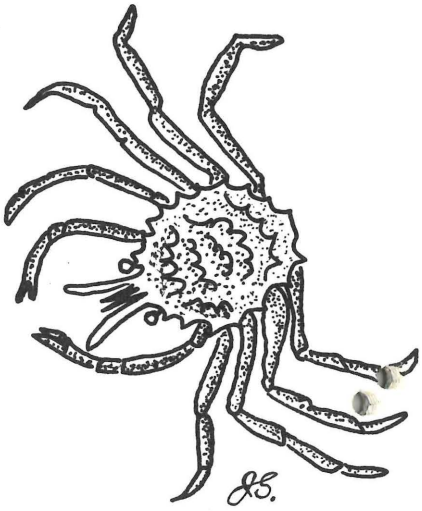
These snakes hibernate together, sometimes in great numbers. Usually the den is no more than a very deep crevice in a rock ledge. When going into hibernation the snakes move far enough under ground to be beyond the reach of freezing temperatures, and there they remain until spring.

Next time we will talk about the timber rattlesnake...

IF OUR NEW BUILDING IS TO BECOME A REALITY, WE NEED YOUR HELP. THE CENTER IS ACCEPTING GIFTS AND PLEDGES TOWARD THE NEW BUILDING FUND.

ALONG THE SHORE

by BARBARA KASHANSKI



THE SPIDER CRAB

Along our shores there are many members of a class of animals called crustaceans. This group has a hard outer covering which protects them from their enemies. All crabs are members of this group. This article will tell about the spider crab.

The spider crab is well named because with his long thin legs, roundish body and small pointed head, he looks much more like a big spider than a crab. It isn't very often that one finds a live spider crab. They like to live where we don't walk--on the muddy bottom and among seaweed in shallow shore waters. Usually all we see of the spider crab is the discarded, bumpy skeleton that has been washed up on the shore.

Spider crabs are sometimes called "decorator" crabs. This name comes from their habit of "decorating" their backs and legs with bits of seaweed, pieces of shell, barnacles, sponges and sometimes live sea anenomes. By doing this they mimic their surroundings. In this well-camouflaged state their enemies have a hard time finding them.

Like other crustaceans, the spider crab sheds its hard coat as it grows. Before the old skeleton is cast off the new one has formed just beneath it. In this way, the crab is never left unprotected by its hard outside skeleton.

Although the spider crab might not be our favorite seashore animal to look at, he does help keep our shores clean. He is a scavenger, like most other crabs and eats mostly dead plant and animal life.

Next time you visit the beach, see if you can find the skeleton of a spider crab. Look closely and you might find some of his "decorations" still attached to his old skeleton.

Help Us To Grow And Develop — Invite A Friend To Become A Member.

THAMES SCIENCE CENTER

622 WILLIAMS ST., NEW LONDON, CONN. 06320

Phone: 443-4295

Annual dues: 12 months from _____

Name .....

Street ..... **City** .....

Phone ..... **Zip Code** .....

CLASSES OF MEMBERSHIP

- ☐ **Annual $5 (each adult member of family)**
- ☐ **Family $10**
- ☐ **Supporting $25**
- ☐ **Annual Patron $50**
- ☐ **Organization $10**
- ☐ **Junior (under 16) $3**
- ☐ **A special gift toward support of the Science Center effort is included $**_____

Please make checks payable to The Thames Science Center
Contributions are tax deductible

ROCK HOUNDS

by JERRY THEILER

METAMORPHIC ROCKS

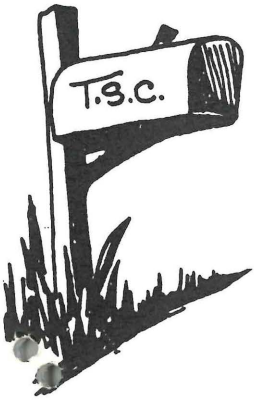
Metamorphic rocks are rocks that have been changed by heat and pressure. This means that they must have been sedimentary, igneous, or a different kind of metamorphic rock before they were changed.

Sedimentary rocks that are squeezed and heated will change into the following rocks:

Sedimentary Rock	Changes To	Medamorphic Rock
Conglomerate	. . . . .	Schist
Sandstone	. . . . .	Quartzite
Shale	. . . . .	Slate
Bituminous Coal	. . . . .	Anthracite Coal

Most of the igneous rocks will change into either schist or gneiss (pronounced nice).

Metamorphic rocks are named after their most important mineral. A gneiss that is mostly made up of the mineral hornblende would therefore be called hornblende gneiss.



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DESK . . . .

We welcome notice of Conservation activities or problems for inclusion in this section of the Naturalist's Notebook. . . . Please let us know of your local activity so that others may be aware of your efforts and lend their support where possible. . . . .

AUDUBON WILDLIFE FILM: The second of the Audubon Wildlife Films sponsored by the Science Center will be shown on Sunday, November 24th at 3:00 P.M. in the Clarke Center at Mitchell College. Mr. C. P. Lyons will present his film entitled Mexican Adventure. Series tickets are still available for this program. Contact the Science Center for further information.

HOW HIGH CAN BIRDS FLY? Pilots have seen: sandpipers, yellowlegs and black-bellied plovers flying at an altitude between 10,000 and 12,000 feet; eagles and geese at 9,000 and ducks at 7,500 feet. Near Mount Everest, godwits and curlews have been reported at 20,000 feet and geese were photographed at an estimated 29,000 feet.

HAWKS AT MOUNT TOM: The Mount Tom field trip on September 28th produced 26 hawks for the 25 people who went. Perfect weather and spectacular scenery added to make a most enjoyable trip. The list of hawks was as follows: 15 red-tailed hawks; 5 sparrow hawks; 2 pigeon hawks; 2 sharp-shinned hawks; 1 Cooper's hawk and 1 goshawk.

BIRD FEEDERS: The Science Center has a complete line of Hyde bird feeders in stock as well as a large supply of mixed and sunflower seeds. Members will receive a discount on any of the items they purchase at the Center store.

UNITED FUND: The Science Center is a member of the United Fund. We urge all our members to give the United Fund their highest support during their current drive. Supporting them will also aid your Science Center.

BLOCK ISLAND WEEKEND: The weekend of October 4, 5 and 6 was the annual Block Island Weekend sponsored by the Rhode Island Audubon Society. Bird watchers from all over New England and neighboring states flocked to the island to witness one of the greatest concentrations of migrating landbirds that occurs anywhere on the Atlantic Coast. Over 300 people attended and combed the island for the thousands of birds blown ashore from the mainland by a stiff northwest wind. At the conclusion of the weekend when all lists were compiled it was found that the birders had gotten the largest list that had ever been recorded on the annual affair--171 species--about one species for every two birders on the island.

LEAVES OF POISON: There are a number of very familiar plants which have poisonous leaves that few people realize. Among them are the leaves of oak and cherry trees, azalea, rhododendron, daffodil, narcissus, hyacinth, larkspur, wisteria, elderberry, poinsettia and rhubarb.

YOUR OWN FAMILY JAUNT

by BOB DEWIRE

ROCKY NECK STATE PARK

November is an excellent time to visit Rocky Neck State Park in East Lyme. Besides finding a great variety of waterfowl in the marsh and land birds in the wooded areas, the numbers of individuals are very high. The hunting season is well underway at this time and numbers of waterfowl have built up in this safe area where hunting is not allowed. The birds are very jumpy however, and a quick movement or slamming of a car door will frighten them so that they will all take off leaving a marsh that is quite empty.

Ducks to look for in the marsh are Mallards and Black Ducks which are present in the hundreds and Pintails and Green-winged Teal which may number up to a hundred or more. There will be lesser numbers of Canada Geese, Gadwall, Baldpate and Hooded Merganser. Uncommon ducks that may be present would include the Shoveler, Ring-necked Duck and Common Merganser.

Great Blue Herons can be seen standing like sticks in the marsh and early in the month Common Egrets may be present. The Greater Yellowlegs is the one shorebird that may be found and the Kingfisher will continue to patrol the area for fish.

Offshore at the beach there are often Common Loons, Horned Grebes, Buffleheads and White-winged Scoters in the water and Great Cormorants will be arriving in flocks from the north to winter here.

The land birding is also quite good at this time of year. The open parking areas may produce Horned Larks, Mourning Doves, Flickers and occasionally Snow Buntings. The areas of red pines will yield Black-capped Chickadees Golden and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Brown Creepers, Slate-colored Juncos and occasionally a Red-breasted Nuthatch. A Red-tailed Hawk usually winters in the park and can often be seen sitting in a tree or flying over the marsh. The ornamental apple trees near the parking area hold robins, purple finches, tree sparrows and goldfinches.

A hard freeze will close up the marsh leaving virtually nothing there, but a warm period of thawing and the birds will seem to come from out of nowhere and return to the area.

A visit to the park is quite worthwhile and also very pleasant at this time of year. Try counting the numbers of ducks you see. It should be quite impressive.

FIELD NOTES

Sept. 15 - Oct. 15

Essex and East Lyme: CANADA GEESE were seen in the Essex area on Oct. 5th and two SNOW GEESE were there on the 6th. Up to 60 PINTAILS are at Rocky Neck along with many BALDPATE and GREEN-WINGED TEAL.

Waterford and New London: WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS and SLATE-COLORED JUNCOS arrived on Sept. 22nd at Magonk Point and a GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET was present the next day. Oct. 1st and 9th were days of heavy movements at Mitchell's Woods and Harkness Park where migrating landbirds filled the trees. Included were dozens of MYRTLE WARBLERS and KINGLETS along with PARULA and CAPE MAY WARBLERS, OVENBIRDS, WINTER WREN, RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH and SWAINSON'S THRUSH. Two single EVENING GROSBEAKS were at feeders in New London on Oct. 6th and Quaker Hill on the 8th. Two WOOD THRUSHES were still at Mary Butler Dr. on Oct. 11th. At Harkness Park there were 5 GOLDEN PLOVER and a PIGEON HAWK on Sept. 22nd. An immature WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW was there on the 25th. A BALDPATE and RED-BREASTED MERGANSER were first sightings on the 29th and an AMERICAN BITTERN was in the inlet on Oct. 9th where a male WOOD DUCK was present on the 14th. Twenty-one BLUEBIRDS were feeding on sumac at the entrance to the park on Oct. 6th. An adult SAW-WHET OWL was picked up in the playground of Nameaug School on Oct. 14th. Healthy, but exhausted from migrating, it was kept at the Science Center for a rest and then photographed (see front cover), banded and released at the Peace Sanctuary.

Groton, Mystic and Stonington: WITCH HAZEL flowered in the Peace Sanctuary on Oct. 14th. Over 1,000 RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS passed over 195 in one flock the evening of Sept. 17th. A YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER was seen at Wamphassuc Point on the 19th and JUNCOS and WHITE-THROATED SPARROWS arrived on the 23rd as did a RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET in Noank. At Bluff Point on Sept. 28th birders saw both PIGEON and SHARP-SHINNED HAWKS. A RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH is coming to a feeder in North Stonington. A DICKCISSEL was at Darling Hill Farm in Stonington on the 4th and another was at Wamphassuc Point. Three GREATER SCAUP were seen on the Mystic River on Oct. 14.

Rhode Island Shoreline: MONARCH BUTTERFLIES are migrating in large numbers all along the coast. A GOLDEN PLOVER was at Napatree Point on Sept. 15th. Two very rare birds present at Galilee were a BUFF-BREASTED SANDPIPER on Oct. 4th and an AVOCET on the 6th.

Contributions to this column were: Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth Bates, Grace Bissell, Janet Boyd, Mrs. Lawrence Chappell, Mrs. Philip Dewire, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Dewire, John Gardner, Helen Gilman, Sam Knox, Mary Laffargue, Margaret MacGregor, Beatrice Maher, Maynard Peterson, Billy Ryan and Mrs. Russell Waldo.

WE ARE ANXIOUS TO HAVE YOUR REPORTS OF NATURE HAPPENINGS FOR THIS SECTION OF THE NATURALIST NOTEBOOK – CALL 443-4295 OR SEND A POSTCARD LISTING A NOTED EVENT . . . .

ACTIVITIES FOR NOVEMBER

Nov. 2 ..... All Day. An adult field trip to Plum Island in Newburyport, Mass. Phone the Center for details.

Nov. 3 ..... 2:00 P.M. FAMILY FILM FESTIVAL held in the auditorium at the Lyman Allyn Museum. Featuring two films--"Creatures of the Sea" and Walt Disney's "Seal Island". Open to members only.

Nov. 16 ..... 8:30 A.M. Field trip to Rocky Neck and area. Meet at parking lot at Rocky Neck.

Nov. 16 ..... 10:00 A.M. Workshop for Grades 1, 2 and 3 "Winter birds at Home Feeders". Advance registration required. Limit of 10 children. Members only. No Charge.

Nov. 17 ..... Field trip to the Peace Sanctuary. Meet at entrance at 2:00 P.M.

Nov. 23 ..... 10:00 A.M. Workshop for Grades 4, 5 and 6 "Care and Feeding of Small Animals in Captivity". Registration required. Limit of 10 children. Members only. No Charge.

Nov. 24 ..... 3:00 P.M. Audubon Wildlife Film "Mexican Adventure" by C. P. Lyons, Clarke Center, Mitchell College.

Nov. 30 ..... 8:00 A.M. Field trip along the Rhode Island Shoreline from Watch Hill to Galilee. Meet at Watch Hill Parking Lot.

THE THAMES SCIENCE CENTER

Your Family Nature Center--Serving Southeastern Connecticut

THAMES SCIENCE CENTER
622 Williams Street
New London, Connecticut 06320
RETURN REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U. S. Postage
PAID
Quaker Hill, Ct.
Permit No. 9

PALMER LIBRARY
CONNECTICUT COLLEGE
NEW LONDON, CONN. 06320

MEMBER UNITED FUND

JOIN OUR FAMILY NATURE JAUNTS